

Irwin Run Canoe Launch Project

Scoping Document

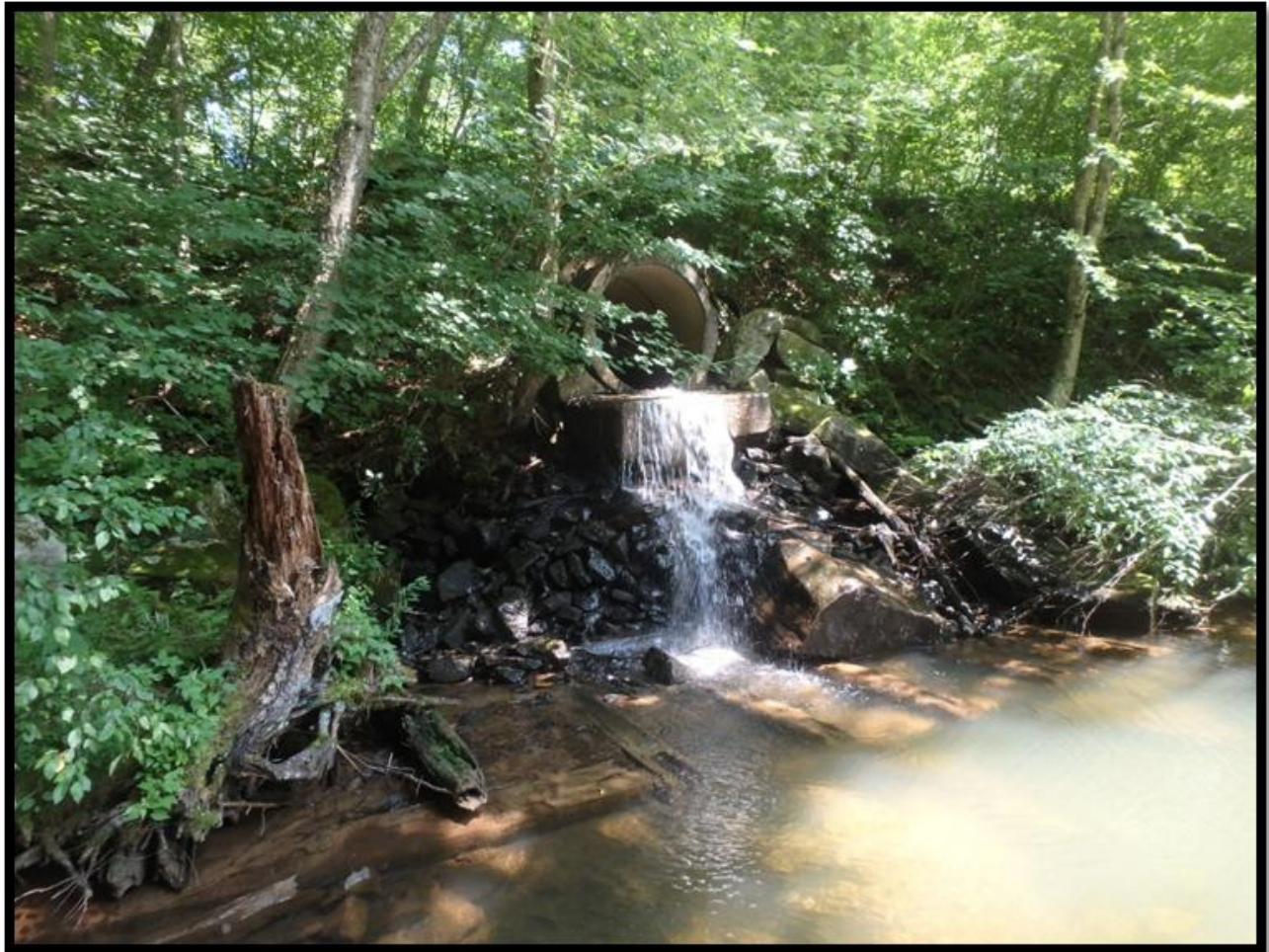


Photo of old culvert associated with Clarion River Railroad proposed for removal, photo by Andrew Myers, Archaeological Technician.



Forest Service

Allegheny
National Forest

Elk County,
Pennsylvania

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OVERVIEW

At the Irwin Run Canoe Launch, the Forest Service, Allegheny National Forest, is proposing to expand and define parking to eliminate overflow onto State Road 3002, redirect traffic to a one-way flow through the parking area, establish an outfitter-guide drop-off zone for canoes and other watercraft, provide better toilet facilities, and enhance the canoe access at the canoe launch.

The Forest Service is also proposing to remove a large culvert on Irwin Run associated with the abandoned Clarion River Railroad. The culvert is upstream of the bridge on State Route 3002 that crosses Irwin Run. Removal of the culvert would restore aquatic organism passage and stream channel and floodplain functions and reduce flooding.

A summary of the activities proposed in this project is provided below. Locations of proposed activities are identified on the attached maps, and additional information is available upon request or on our website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60626>. If you would like to comment on this project before a decision is made, please submit your comments by October 8, 2021.

BACKGROUND

The Irwin Run Canoe Launch is situated within the Allegheny National Forest along the Clarion National Wild and Scenic River at the confluence with Irwin Run. It is the primary take out point for outfitter-guides and the public floating the Clarion River from upstream points of entry at Ridgway, Portland Mills, and Arroyo and a launch site for points downstream. This canoe launch is also situated within the Irwintown historic site, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. It also includes a designated dispersed campsite approximately 300 feet upstream from the canoe launch and the Lily Pond hiking trail.

Currently, the canoe launch has parking for 12 vehicles and two trailers and provides access to the Clarion River. During peak use between April and September, parking is inadequate, and overflow parking spills on to State Road 3002, which provides access to the canoe launch. The overflow parking is haphazard, deteriorates the roadside drainage ditches, and presents a safety hazard due to sight distance and grade on State Road 3002 because the canoe launch sits at the base of a long, winding grade. In recent years, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has worked with the Forest Service to better define access to the canoe launch with guiderails and signing. They replaced the bridge over Irwin Run, southwest of the entrance to the canoe launch; and, in 2020, they repaved State Road 3002 and improved the roadside ditches and drainage structures.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to help achieve the desired condition described in the Forest Plan for Management Areas 2.2, 3.0, and 8.1 by responding to Forest Plan, Management Areas 2.2, 3.0, and 8.1 goals and objectives.

The Forest Service is proposing to address two distinct issues with at Irwin Run Canoe Launch.

1. **Canoe Launch** – The Forest Service has developed a design and construction package to expand and define parking to eliminate overflow onto State Road 3002, manage traffic in and out of the parking area, establish an outfitter-guide drop-off zone, provide better toilet facilities, and enhance the canoe access.
2. **Stream Restoration** – There is a need to remove the large culvert on Irwin Run, upstream of the bridge, to eliminate an impediment to aquatic organism passage and restore the stream channel and floodplain. This would reduce potential for flooding and erosion by removing this undersized culvert. The Forest Service is proposing to remove a large culvert within the old railroad grade crossing Irwin Run. This is upstream of the bridge on State Route 3002 and across the state road from the canoe launch. This would eliminate an impediment to aquatic organism passage and restore the streambanks. The stream restoration includes recruiting and anchoring woody debris upstream of the culvert. Irwin Run and its tributaries lack enough large wood to create quality pools, slow flood flows, or store sediment and organic debris. The proposed large wood additions would help improve aquatic, flooding, and sediment retention conditions in Irwin Run overall. Several sections of Irwin Run were observed to be scoured to bedrock, and large wood would help store spawning gravels.

In the 2021 Draft Recreation Facility Strategy Report in support of Recreation Site Analysis for the Allegheny National Forest, the Irwin Run Canoe Launch has the lowest sustainability score of any developed site on the Allegheny National Forest, indicating that, if the Forest Service continues to operate this site in its current condition, it will continue to deteriorate, affecting components of the National Register Historic site, the Clarion Wild and Scenic River, and safety of vehicles and people using the adjacent State Road 3002. The recreation site analysis considered closing this site, but this would create backlogs of outfitter-guide traffic at other access points along the river, as well as scatter general public use to unspecified dispersed parking along the Clarion River, leading to additional streambank deterioration.

Since 2006, the Forest Service has partnered with a host of local and state government entities, as well as non-profit organizations and universities, to manage recreation use and stabilize streambanks along the Clarion Wild and Scenic River. Irwin Run is a key component of this long-term strategy that has invested millions of dollars through a variety of federal, state and private funding mechanisms in road improvements, bridge and culvert replacements, facilities improvements, designating and improving camp sites and parking, installing interpretive and directional signing, developing print materials, and restoring and stabilizing eroded streambanks.

The Forest Service has requested funding through the Great American Outdoors Act for 2022 to make the proposed improvements to the canoe launch parking area. The Forest Service would allocate funding from other sources to do the stream restoration work.

PROPOSED ACTION

IMPROVING AND ENLARGING IRWIN RUN CANOE LAUNCH

Canoe Launch – Expand existing parking area by approximately ½-acre, from current footprint with 12 vehicle slots and 2 trailer slots, to a new footprint with 36 total vehicle slots. Restructure traffic flow from one entrance on to the State Road 3002 for ingress and egress to two separate

intersections, one for ingress (existing entrance) and one for egress. Traffic flow would be one-way through the facility. Replace existing one-hole vault toilet (timber construction) with new two-hole vault toilet (pre-cast concrete construction) in a new location directly accessible from parking lot. Replace existing canoe launch ramp with concrete accessible ramp. Move interpretive kiosk and site signing as appropriate to serve new site design. Install timber parking wheel stops and bollards. This work would include:

- Clearing and grubbing on ½-acre
- Approximately 1,135 cubic yards of excavation
- Construction of access road and parking area with fabric and stone base and gravel surfacing. Parking to include 27 10 feet by 20 feet single car spaces, two van accessible parking spaces, four 10 feet by 40 feet auto/trailer parking spaces, two 12 feet by 40 feet auto/trailer parking spaces, and one 10 feet by 66 feet loading/staging space.
- Construction of 291 square feet of 4-feet wide concrete pads for accessible ramp and toilet building
- Construction of 356 linear feet of natural stone retaining wall to protect accessible ramp to river

IMPROVING STREAM HABITAT

Stream Restoration - Remove the culvert and fill of the railroad grade so that there is enough room to accommodate the bankfull flow and an appropriate floodplain for Irwin Run, a cold-water fishery with a natural wild trout reproduction. To stabilize the stream and to create a more sustainable/natural stream slope of 5 percent, we would need to create a stable grade between the downstream grade control and a stable grade control about 250 feet upstream of the culvert inlet. The western limits upstream of the culvert will be the top of right bank facing downstream. The eastern limits would be widest near the culvert and would get narrower as the project moves upstream due to less aggradation in the channel and less need for floodplain creation as we move upstream.

Stream restoration downstream of the culvert would involve rock grade controls built at the downstream end of the pool to raise the stream elevation approximately three feet. These structures would be tied into the banks to keep them from being eroded. The stream restoration through the culvert removal/railroad grade and upstream would entail excavating material from the stream channel to a natural elevation. Through the railroad grade, the stream channel would be constructed with a series of rock riffles using available boulders and large rocks. Upstream of the culvert, large rootwads with logs attached, rocks, and large wood would be used to build a series of grade controls to keep the stream from downcutting through the aggraded material and to improve aquatic habitat. In addition to the stream channel, a floodplain about 20 feet wide would be constructed adjacent to Irwin Run and excavated to one foot above the stream elevation. Most trees in the floodplain area shown on the map (about 20 feet from the current stream channel) would be harvested for rootwads and large wood to be placed in the stream. Also, trees growing on the section of railroad grade that would be recontoured would be harvested from the area to regrade the stream channel and floodplain. The floodplain would be narrower than depicted at some locations to protect designated larger trees.

Clean fill would be spread across the forest floor and over steep banks in two locations. This fill would be loosely spread and smoothed with the excavator bucket. It would not be compacted and would avoid placing more than 6 inches soil on average within the drip lines of mature trees. The fill would be kept 50 feet away from the edge of the stream channel.

The project would also include large wood additions on 4.9 miles of Irwin Run and its tributaries (80 trees per mile). Of these miles, 4.6 miles would be Level 1 (felling trees into place in streams) and 0.3 miles would be Level 2 (large wood felling into streams in combination with winching the trees to drag them to the stream so they are stable and functional in the channel).

This large wood proposal would help improve aquatic, flooding, and sediment retention conditions in Irwin Run overall. Several sections of Irwin Run were observed to be scoured to bedrock, and large wood would help store spawning gravels. These benefits to the stream would improve success of the restoration at the railroad grade.

To retain old growth trees within or near the project area, we will implement the following project design features:

- Do not cut, fell, or damage any trees over 24 inches in diameter at breast height for large wood additions (**USDA-FS 2007, page 65**).
- Do not cut, fell, or damage mast producing shrubs or trees, such as oak, cucumbertree, or apple, white pine, or other conifers greater than 18 inches in diameter at breast height for large wood additions. Other deciduous trees will be the primary choice of tree for felling. Conifers will only be cut where they make up a more than 50 percent of the canopy. In remaining areas, do not cut/fell conifer, except for operational trees (safety) (**USDA-FS 2007, page 65**).

IRWINTOWN HISTORIC SITE

To mitigate the adverse effects of proposed activities to the Irwintown historic site, the Forest Service proposes to erect two interpretive signs on the site. These signs will be designed to convey the historical significance of the location and point out some visible features that visitors will be able to relate to. Possible sign locations are shown on map 1.

As further mitigation, the Forest Service will conduct data recovery prior to the construction activities. During the data recovery, the foundational remains of a former structure that will be impacted by proposed road construction will be fully documented, and the recovered artifact assemblage associated with the feature will be catalogued, analyzed, and interpreted in a future professional Heritage report.

Portions of the 1850s era bracket dam are visible and intact in the channel of Irwin Run beneath the culvert and railroad fill material. These remains, if confirmed to be from the original mill dam, would likely contribute to the overall NRHP eligibility of the Irwintown Historic Site (36EL0183). The Forest Service will attempt to retain the feature “in-situ” following removal of the overlying fill and the cement culvert that currently carries Irwin Run through it. However, since it is not known whether the feature will remain intact during the stream improvements, forest heritage resource personnel will be present to monitor excavation activity. Once exposed; the remains of the bracket dam will be fully documented

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

We will consider public comments and determine if the proposed action may affect resources to the point where an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement must be prepared. If so, the appropriate type of analysis will be conducted. If not, we will likely exclude the project from further documentation using the following categorical exclusions:

- Construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, or disposal of buildings, infrastructure, or improvements at an existing recreation site, including infrastructure or improvements that are adjacent or connected to an existing recreation site and provide access or utilities for that site. Recreation sites include but are not limited to campgrounds and camping areas, picnic areas, day use areas, fishing sites, interpretive sites, visitor centers, trailheads, ski areas, and observation sites. Activities within this category are intended to apply to facilities located at recreation sites managed by the Forest Service and those managed by concessioners under a special use authorization (36 C.F.R. § 220.6(e)(22)).
- Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction (36 C.F.R. § 220.6(e)(6)).
- Restoring wetlands, streams, riparian areas or other water bodies by removing, replacing, or modifying water control structures such as, but not limited to, dams, levees, dikes, ditches, culverts, pipes, drainage tiles, valves, gates, and fencing, to allow waters to flow into natural channels and floodplains and restore natural flow regimes to the extent practicable where valid existing rights or special use authorizations are not unilaterally altered or canceled (36 C.F.R. § 220.6(e)(18)).

HOW TO COMMENT

If you would like to comment on this project, please submit your comments in one of the following ways no later than October 8, 2021:

By mail: Rob Fallon, District Ranger
Allegheny National Forest
Marienville Ranger District
131 Smokey Lane
Marienville, PA 16239

By fax: 814-927-2285

By email: comments-eastern-allegheny-marienville@usda.gov. Please enter the project name (*Irwin Run Canoe Launch Project*) on the subject line and include your name and physical mailing address with your comments.

By telephone: Comments may be provided by calling 814-927-6628. Normal business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Please note that any comments received, including the names and addresses of those who submit

comments, will be part of the public record and available for public inspection.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about this project, please feel free to contact Kevin Treese, Planning Team Leader, at (814) 927-5759 or kevin.treeese@usda.gov or review the scoping documents and maps posted to our website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60626>.